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# Advocates Call On Government of Bangladesh to Cease Repression of Workers

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US, Canadian & European Labor Rights Advocates Call On Government of Bangladesh to Cease Repression of Workers Who Make Clothing for Wal-Mart, Gap and Others

Government Crackdown Aims at Resisting Workers' Demand for Decent minimum wage

Protest Leaders Forced into Hiding to Escape Arrest and Beatings

Leading labor and human rights organizations in the US, Canada and Europe have launched a campaign to press the government of Bangladesh to cease immediately its repression of clothing workers, tens of thousands of whom make clothing for retailers including Wal-Mart, Gap, H&M, Tesco, and Marks & Spencer. The groups involved include the International Labor Rights Forum, SweatFree Communities, Maquila Solidarity Network, United Students Against Sweatshops, the Clean Clothes Campaign, and the Worker Rights Consortium.

The Bangladeshi government's crackdown on labor rights advocates is taking place amidst massive public demonstrations by apparel workers who have been pressing for increases in the country's 11 cents/hour minimum wage for years, raised July 29 to just 20 cents/hour. Even with last week's increase in the minimum wage to US\$42 (3000 taka) per month, Bangladeshi apparel workers earn less than their counterparts anywhere else in the world. Having faced substantial food price inflation in recent years, workers throughout Bangladesh were demanding a minimum wage of at least US\$72 (5000 taka) per month, up from the less than a dollar per day wage of US \$24 (1662 taka) per month set in 2006.

Last Friday (July 30), the government of Bangladesh filed criminal charges against leaders of apparel workers organizations and attempted to arrest some of them.

Labor rights groups are calling for the immediate withdrawal of all criminal charges filed against the staff of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS), an internationally recognized and respected labor rights NGO. BCWS leaders Ms. Kalpona Akter, Mr. Babul Akhter, and Mr. Aminul Islam have been accused of inciting worker unrest following worker protests at Bangladeshi manufacturer Nassa Global Wear and massive worker protests over the Bangladeshi government's failure to meet workers' demand for a 5000tk minimum wage. Said Tessel Pauli of the Europe-based Clean Clothes Campaign, "The Bangladesh government should immediately stop their witch hunt against garment workers and their organizations, and instead address the root causes destabilizing the garment industry."

The charges are the latest in a series of attempts by the government to restrict the work of BCWS and their members. On June 3, the government revoked BCWS' registration, effectively canceling its license to operate and ordered the organization's property seized and its bank account frozen. On June 16, Mr. Islam, also named in the recent suits, was detained by National Security Intelligence officers and severely beaten before he managed to escape.

Bangladesh is one of the prime manufacturing locations for most of the world's best known apparel brands and retailers, including Wal-Mart, Gap, H&M, Marks & Spencer, and Tesco, but also has the lowest wages and some of the poorest working conditions. Labor rights groups are calling on these brands and retailers, and the Bangladesh government, to demand an immediate stop to the repression of BCWS. "Major brands and retailers producing in Bangladesh have significant influence with the government and should use it to insist on fair treatment of workers and their advocates, including BCWS," said Bjorn Claeson, Director of SweatFree Communities at the International Labor Rights Forum.

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International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. ILRF works to stop child labor, promote and protect the rights of working women, end sweatshop labor, and to end violence against trade unions. In addition ILRF is focused through its SweatFree Communities campaigns on the promotion of labor rights of garment workers especially in countries like Bangladesh. Learn more at [www.laborrights.org](http://www.laborrights.org) <sup>[1]</sup> and [www.sweatfree.org](http://www.sweatfree.org) <sup>[2]</sup>.

The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) is a labour and women's rights organization that supports the efforts of workers in global supply chains to win improved wages and working conditions and a better quality of life. For more information, please visit [www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org) <sup>[3]</sup>

The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) works to improve conditions and support the empowerment of workers in the global garment industry. It has national campaigns in 14 European countries with a network of 250 organizations worldwide. For more information, please visit [www.cleanclothes.org](http://www.cleanclothes.org) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) is an independent labor rights monitoring organization, conducting investigations of working conditions in factories around the globe. The WRC is proud to have the support of over 175 college and university affiliates and its primary focus is the labor practices of factories that make apparel and other goods bearing university logos. For more information, please visit [www.workersrights.org](http://www.workersrights.org) <sup>[5]</sup>.

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Source URL: <http://laborrights.org/creating-a-sweatfree-world/sweatshops/news/12379>

Links:

[1] <http://www.laborrights.org>

[2] <http://www.sweatfree.org>

[3] <http://www.maquilasolidarity.org>

[4] <http://www.cleanclothes.org>

[5] <http://www.workersrights.org>